SEVENTH EDITION.

THE STRANGE STORY.

A

MEXICAN MYSTERY.

BY

W. GROVE.

"Is a shilling's-worth which nobody will read and yet pretend he has not had the value of his money."—*Extract from lengthy notice in The Saturday Review.*

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CHAPTER I: THE NEW RAILWAY

My name is John Brown, “Mr. John Brown, C.E.,” as I had it printed on my door plate, at the proud epoch when having served my articles to the great firm of Bordsley and Son, and having further completed two years as an “improver” on the Swilsden Railway Works, I established myself in business on my own account in a provincial town. An office in an excellent position, with fittings complete even to the regulation gum-bottle and ball of string, and an office boy whom I called a clerk, should have brought in business on a large scale; but like too many others I found that times were bad and money scarce, and what business was worth doing was handed over to the great names of the profession, while we small fry had to content ourselves with the crumbs that fell from the great men’s table. Thus it happened that after some years’ strict attention to business in the town aforesaid, during which time I had contrived to eke out a bare subsistence, I found myself still quite unsettled, and ready to apply for any appointment that might be going, most of them alas! too quickly snapped up by the hungry juniors of the profession.

It chanced that a fellow-pupil with whom I had maintained a desultory friendship, had deserted the paths of engineering for the more profitable walks of finance. He had become secretary to a firm of financial agents, Company promoters, or | know not what; but this I do know, that they drew twenty-five per cent. on every monetary operation that passed through their hands. I had heard nothing of my friend for some months, when one rainy evening, about nine o'clock, a loud ring at my bell caused me some surprise, but not half so much as my friend’s appearance immediately after.

“Why, Rivers,” said I, “I thought you were in town.”

“So I was,” replied he, “up till five o'clock this evening, and so I shall be again after four to-morrow morning. I am going back by the night mail. No, thank you very much, can’t sleep. I have come to ask you if you will go to Mexico, to look after a new line they want to make up the country. This new emperor of theirs is a go-ahead sort. But the point is, if you accept you must send your consent back by me at once, and sail from Southampton on Tuesday week.”

Tuesday week! and this was Friday. How to dispose of my business (though I smiled grimly at the idea!), bid farewell to my friends, purchase my outfit, and—

“They offer £600 a year,” said my friend.

“Rivers! I'll go.” And I went.

I shall not detain you with the account of the voyage and subsequent journey across the American Continent; though I observe nowadays that every Tomfool who sails or steams a thousand miles thinks it necessary to record his experiences in a large octavo volume—and thankful we must be if he draws the line at one volume: happily we are not obliged to read them:—my story being entirely concerned with the remarkable incidents I witnessed after reaching my destination, I do not imagine the reader will care to be detained by descriptions of flying fish, shark-catching, or the manners and customs of Indian tribes, as observed from horseback by a traveller who did not care a dime about them. Nevertheless, if my publisher thinks some such padding essential as a concession to the public taste, let him select it where he will. Are there not encyclopedias and gazetteers, and do not books of travel abound? Suffice it to say that after a tedious and miserable journey I reached the city of Mexico, where I spent some weeks picking up what I could of the Spanish language, and was presented to the Emperor, that unhappy Austrian Archduke, who for his sins was persuaded by the Brummagem Bonaparte to act the part of a Brummagem Montezuma, till in General Juerez: he met more than his Cortez. Full of eager interest and enthusiasm for his civilizing mission was this ill-fated prince on the occasion of my audience: little did I think that the next time but one I should see him his lifeless form would lie: pierced by the bullets of his assassins, borne through the city on an open bier, a spectacle to gods and men.

For my part I was eager to enter upon my new duties, and at the earliest opportunity made for my head quarters, which were fixed at the small town of Xiqipu, whence my new line was to strike off towards the mountains. It was for no ordinary traffic that this railway was intended. The discovery of the great Californian goldfields had directed the attention of geologists to other portions of the vast formation which fringes the West Coast of the American Continent, and upon their favourable reports the unhappy Maximilian was building the wildest dreams. With every precaution to ensure secrecy Imperial agents had been prospecting throughout the mountainous regions of the interior, and it was a find of extraordinary value at a point in the Sierra Madre subsequently known as Santa Fé, that had decided His Majesty on the construction of this line. How the geologists proved at fault, and this remarkable find of gold proved to be an isolated pocket leading to nothing more, is matter of history. But at the time of which I write those who were in the secret, and they were many more than the Emperor would have approved, were full of whispers about an El Dorado which should make California

green with envy.

My work proved sufficiently laborious not only by reason of the great natural difficulties of the route, but quite as much from the impracticable character of my subordinates, most of whom united to an intense ignorance a more than Castilian pride which forbade them to accept instruction. One indeed there was, a young man of five or six and twenty, by no means wanting in wits, and possessed of professional knowledge surprising for his years, yet goaded ‘by so ungoverned an imagination that I used to ask myself twenty times a day whether he was more plague or profit? Pedro da Luz, as he called himself, claimed descent from an ancient family of Leon, but he could with more certainty trace his ancestry to some of the old Aztec stock, and though I never heard him speak of it, I know he believed himself to bear the Royal blood of Montezuma in his veins. However that might be, his parents were dead, and had left him a fortune that in Mexico would be considered a good one, ample at all events to enable him to spend his days in a Mexican paradise—doing nothing. For all that, this singular young man, who seemed devoured by a mad passion for mechanism, such as I had seen in a minor degree among some of my old fellow-pupils, unaccountably preferred to abandon his hacienda to a bailiff, and come and work like a mechanic under a heretic engineer.

A literary friend who once wrote a novel—and by the way it is amazing to me what a quantity of copies of that novel he possesses, for he has been giving them to all his acquaintances for fifteen years, and all of the first edition—this literary friend, I say, informs me that no reader will proceed another line unless I at once give a description of my hero. It is in vain I ask him how he knows Pedro is my hero? He only loses his temper and tells me not to try to gammon him. Well since he has already discovered the hero, I presume my readers will be equally acute, and I describe him accordingly:—Pedro da Luz was of dark yet clear olive complexion, intensely black curly hair, of the middle height, but looking taller, with finely-formed hands and feet, and the most mobile face I ever saw. Not an emotion affected his mind Without its reflection appearing in his countenance, and it was an amusement to me to guess, as I could pretty accurately, by the expression of his face, what was passing in his thoughts. Add to this, a singularly sweet smile, and a marvellous rapt expression, such as Raphael might have given to St. John in Patmos, when his fancy got the better of him, and you now know all I can tell you of the person of my chief mechanic.

And now that you have the hero, I suppose you will want the heroine. Inez d’Onor—but how shall I describe her? I cannot trust myself to say

more than that never in the Old World or the New, have I seen a beauty to compare with her. And so far as I could see, her character was as perfect as her form. In her opposite qualities seemed to attain their ideal perfection; high-spirit and gentleness, resolution and unselfishness, burning indignation at wrong, and compassion for a wrong-doer; all these contraries, and many more, combined but as notes in the grand harmony of her soul. When I think of her sad end I can yet feel that Providence was kind in removing her from us while at her best; before the fair form waned, and the pure soul was clogged with trivial cares; so that she ever abides in our hearts the ideal of noble womanhood.

CHAPTER II: PEDRO'S ENGINE

The enterprise proved rather cumbrous to get under weigh, and I soon found that if anything was to be done, or at least properly done, it must be under my direct supervision. At first I tried to manage matters from my headquarters at Xiqipu, but very soon I found it necessary to establish a travelling office moving forward with the progress of the line. Indeed, I was always either in the saddle, moving backwards and forwards from point to point, or actually doing with my own hands the work of every trade; showing the bricklayers how to lay bricks, the Masons how to set stone, the linesmen how to fix rails, and the very navvies how to clear out the various varieties of clay, sand, etc., that they encountered, to the best advantage and with least labour. Never in my life did I work so hard; never did I enjoy such splendid health. I had brought myself into perfect training, and it was matter of daily remark among the men that nothing seemed to fatigue me. The worthy friar who accompanied our workmen in the capacity of Confessor, explained the phenomenon, as I afterwards learned, by stating that all heretics made a compact with the Evil One by virtue of which they were permitted to surpass true Catholics in this life under pain of losing their souls in the next. If this imputation was not very flattering to me, I was quite contented to rest under it, when I found that it gave me a remarkable hold over a very unruly but superstitious team, who would rather have disobeyed the Confessor himself than one who could command the services of Satan.

By taking a roving commission up and down the line, which I may mention was about seventy miles in length, I was compelled to leave the mechanical department in other hands. The locomotives and tolling stock were all sent out from Liège in sections, to be set up on arrival. There was absolutely no one to whom I could entrust this important section of the work, except my young friend Pedro da Luz, and it was not without many misgivings, and only because I saw no other feasible plan, that I handed over the entire control of the machinery to his erratic and unbusinesslike genius.

By dint of constant exertion the line gradually began to assume something like its final shape, and after an absence from headquarters of some weeks, during Which I had been engaged on the remoter portion of the line, it occurred to me that it would be as well to go and inspect the machinery department. I rode slowly home, inspecting the works as I went, and feeling that I might really congratulate myself on the advance made during my seven months' work. On

arriving at the office I was surprised to find it empty, and walking round the yard was even more vexed to see no sign of workmen, until I lighted on a man behind a pile of sleepers, who was lazily pretending to drive a bolt.

“Hi, Pablo!” I shouted, “where are all the men? Where is the chief?”

“The men, Señor? They have gone off to the procession of the Madre de Dios. The chief? He is where he always is, in the private shed.”

“Go and fetch him,” said I, muttering something not very complimentary to the Madre di Dios, who appeared to have a procession once a fortnight, when the men all made holiday as a matter of course, besides getting so drunk as to be useless on the day following. But then I was a heretic, and failed to see the connection between religion on the one hand, and idleness and intoxication on the other.

Pedro soon made his appearance in a grimy apron, with hands and face smirched with oil, which did not prevent him from hugging me and kissing me on both cheeks, after the fashion of those excitable countries. At any rate, thought I, he has not been neglecting his business.

“Well, Pedro, and how are the engines?” I asked, when I recovered breath.

“The engines, oh, capital!—at least, no, I forgot, *your engines*, I am afraid, have not got on very much—”

“That's a pity. Let us go and see;” and I led the way into the locomotive shed. I certainly had some excuse for indignation. One boiler had been hoisted On its frame, and a pair of cylinders had been set on end to receive their pistons; otherwise I could perceive no sign of any work to show for the many weeks during which a staff of five-and-twenty men had been constantly employed.

“But what have you been doing with yourselves since I left?” I enquired, “a child would have done more in the time.”

“Now, Juan! my kind Juan!” said he, with his engaging smile, which was always too much for my anger, ‘I haven’t been idle, really I haven’t, but some work of my own was so pressing, and those rascally workmen would shirk when my eye was not on them. What? one can’t be in two places at once. While I am in the private shed they slink away.”

I reminded him that he was placed there to look after the workmen and to do the work of the railway and not private engineering of his own.

“Besides,” said I, “what is this private work? Show it to me!”

“Now, Juan, I implore you, trust me a little longer. I will show you my work before it is seen by any other mortal eye. You don’t believe in me, but I know you will be amazed when my engine—well, there, I have told you the secret! Keep it for me a few weeks.”

Poor Pedro was so much in earnest that I scolded him no more, and trusting to the effect of my evident vexation to spur him to more vigorous exertion, I departed again to my mountain district, leaving him in charge of the engines once more. This time my absence was for a shorter period. Returning one day unexpectedly, I again found the office void, the yard deserted, and the solitary workman still engaged in driving a bolt, the same bolt I verily believe on which he was occupied three weeks previously.

“Where are the men?” I cried angrily, “and where is the chief? and what are you doing here, you old idiot?”

“The men, Señor?” replied he with perfect courtesy, “the men have all gone to the procession of the Madre di Dios——”

“D——— the Madre di Dios,” roared I (with regret I confess it); but he continued:

“And the chief is where he always is, in the private shed.” And seeing me moving off in that direction, he sprang up with alacrity, and anticipated me. I turned off, however, and made for the locomotive shed. There my wrath boiled up afresh. Everything was as I had left it —the melancholy boiler perched upon its truck, the two cylinders with mouths upward, gaping for their contents—no, I am wrong, one cylinder had had the piston and piston rod placed in it and there left: that was all the work to show for three weeks. I turned round fuming, and saw Pedro advancing towards me with outstretched arms.

“Is this all?’ I gasped, scarce able to articulate from anger, “is this all you have done since I left?”

Pedro hung his head. “Alas, it is, but—”

“Señor Don Pedro da Luz,” said I, “‘if a Catholic Spaniard of high blood thinks it honest to take a salary and then neglect all his duties, I can only tell you that a Protestant Englishman of no family is a more honourable man. The Santa Fé Railway no longer requires your services. A month’s salary will be paid to you in consideration of your instant dismissal.”

A fierce flash gleamed in Pedro’s eyes when I made the remarks that reflected on his honour, but he checked himself with an effort, muttering, ‘Lo he merecido.”

“I have deserved it.”

“It is true,” he said aloud, “I have neglected my work and taken a salary I have not earned. A year ago, had any man charged me with acting dishonourably, my knife would have been in his heart. Come, and I will at least show you that I have not been idle.” So saying he led the way to the private shed, put the key in the lock, but before turning it, spoke again.

“Do you recollect the prize of five thousand dollars offered by the government for the best design of an engine suited to the steep gradients and light-laid railways of these mountains?”

“I do,” said I, for indeed I had thought of competing, but the close attention demanded by the construction of my line put it out of the question.

“Well, I have been making a design for the competition. But I have transcended all previous engine-makers’ ideas. Not only will my machine ascend and descend any incline, but I have sought to make it self-feeding, so that being once started, it will continue its course indefinitely.”

I laughed, “It would soon come to a standstill at the first terminus.”

“I have thought of that,” said he. “Three hundred metres from each terminus sink a constant electric battery with brass ribands projecting upwards, which shall strike a contact-maker beneath the locomotive. This will reverse the engines.”

“No doubt it might,” said I, musing on the possibilities opened by this novel idea. ‘But, Pedro, come now, you are laughing at me.”

“See,” said he, flinging wide the gates, and an astonishing sight met my gaze. Was it a steam-engine? I supposed it must be, for it was on wheels, and there Were various links in the chain of cause and effect that could have no other Meaning to an engineer’s eye. But what was the meaning of this strange shape? What was this great pipe that hung down from the front like an elephant’s trunk? What were those great arms of steel terminating in formidable claws projecting Many feet from the body of the machine, and giving it a hideous resemblance to Some great land-crab?

I looked enquiringly at Pedro. “I will explain,” said he. “These great arms are to gather in fuel. Of course we have no fuel but timber here. When the tender becomes half empty and relieves the Springs of a certain amount of pressure, a lever-arm rises and admits the steam to the mechanism of these arms; they instantly spread out to a distance of ten feet on each side, clutch any small timber within range, and this

small circular saw, revolving with great velocity, cuts it asunder. ‘The log is almost instantaneously sawn into billets, and passes along those endless bands to the tender, until the balance is restored. Another endless band passes the fuel into the furnaces.”

“Well, but if your arms struck a large forest tree—”

“Then, if in three-tenths of a second there is no yielding (that time corresponding to the length of play of the arms), this back-joint comes into action and lets the grip relax and the engine pass on. Then for water, you see this pipe. My water-cistern is balanced like my fuel store, and when half empty this pipe is lowered between the rails. It will thus draw up water from the three long tanks you are going to construct for me——”

“Oh, so I am going to build your tanks, am I?”

“Which will be kept full by means of a mountain stream.”

It was wonderful. Look at it as critically as I would, everything seemed provided for. But I made one objection.

“But, Pedro, when you have cleared away the wood for ten feet on each side of the engines, these arms will be of no further use.”

“It will be long before you clear away seventy miles of forest,” he replied, “longer perhaps than the line will be required. Besides, even so, I suppose it will be possible to fit longer arms? And if you are not yet satisfied, can we not pile stacks of timber within reach of the machine and let it help itself?”

“Well, it may act,” said I; “I cannot see anything precisely to prevent it, but I shall never quite believe that you have made a self-supporting, independent machine until I see it at work.”

“That you shall soon do,” returned he, grasping my hand. “Hurry on your line, and let us have our trial trip.”

We had some more conversation on the subject of the regular engine work, and a bargain was struck by which he was to give his whole attention to the railway business up to four o’clock each day, after which he might devote himself to his beloved machine. This time I felt sure I might depend on him, nor was I disappointed.

CHAPTER III: THE TRIAL TRIP

The months flew by, but with each one I had the satisfaction of feeling that more progress had been made than in the last, as my workmen became more efficient, and even to some degree infected by the spirit of eagerness with animated me. More than half the line Was now ready, or required but a few days' work to make it ready for traffic; and a hew find of auriferous quartz forty miles up from Xiqipu, at a place called Mestra, had redoubled the general enthusiasm, and made the Court and public more impatient than ever for the opening of the line. Accordingly all hands were concentrated on the section between Xiqipu and Mestra, and the opening was appointed for a certain day—a feast of the Madre di Dios, of course. Meantime Pedro had been working with remorseful energy at the neglected engines,but owing to the months wasted, he had a hard matter to get them completed in time. Besides, it was a matter of importance to him to have his own machine in perfect order for the opening day, so he was seldom absent from the works. Never did man work so hard. Sleep and meals were equally neglected, till at last finding entreaties vain, and fearing he would collapse with brain fever, I caused the gangs to be turned out every day at four and the doors locked, so as to compel him to take some rest. The sole result was, that he would go over to the private shed and fidget with his own engine.

The opening of the line was fixed for a Sunday, and on the Monday previous, I started to ride the whole length of the section to Mestra, and to satisfy myself that all was in order. Much was done in a temporary way, but as I rode slowly down from Mestra on the Thursday, I Could see to my satisfaction that all would be sufficiently complete for the passage of the Royal train, for the Emperor and Empress had announced their intention to make the first journey Over the new road, and it would be my duty as Chief Engineer to drive the train On this occasion. Pedro had done wonders in the locomotive shed. Of the five engines sent out from Liège, four had been put together, tried, adjusted, and pronounced fit for service, while the fifth he declared he would have ready, even if he sat up the whole of Friday and Saturday nights, which indeed he actually did.

On the Sunday morning, which was, I remember, an exceptionally hot day, I was up betimes, rather excited, and a little nervous, at least I remember I cut myself twice shaving, and I believe I gave the same orders three or four times in my anxiety that all should go well. If you, courteous reader, are quite sure you would have been cool and

collected, wait until your life's work is on its trial, and you are going to drive an Emperor and Empress with your own hand, when any hitch will be regarded as your fault, and you are by no means confident of the quality of machinery put into your hand. I proceeded, however, to dress myself *en grande tenue*, went through the form of breakfasting, and then walked over to the locomotive shed, where I found Pedro sitting down dead tired, contemplating his finished handiwork with exultation. The stokers were lighting the engine fires.

"Well done, Pedro!" said I, slapping him on the shoulder, "you have made the running well at the finish, And now you had better look sharp and get into your best clothes, as the Emperor will be here in little over an hour."

"No, Juan, my dear friend, you forget I have to prepare my machine for this afternoon. There is no other engine entered for the five thousand dollar prize, but I must run mine over the course if Only to show it is competent for its work."

I regret to say that in the excitement of the opening of my line, I had temporarily forgotten poor Pedro's expectations,

"Very good, then, Pedro, you shall Make your trial trip in the afternoon, as Soon as ours is well over, and I trust With all my heart your engine will answer all your hopes, and win the prize, though you must own that if it were decided like the contest of the Goddesses by beauty, you would have a poor chance."

Pedro smiled and muttered a Spanish proverb, equivalent to our "Handsome is that handsome does," and so we parted.

In order to avoid the excessive heat, the Court were to start at a very early hour, stopping for breakfast *en route*. It was reckoned that they would reach Xiqipu at 10.30, and that the start by rail should take place by 11. From 10 o'clock you will imagine how I looked at my watch every five minutes, and how when 10.30 came I could not sit still for an instant, but paced the room up and down, picturing all sorts of improbabilities which might prevent or mar our opening day. It was a blessed relief when at 10.55 two liveried outriders trotted at a smart pace up the sordid street. Their Majesties arrived a few minutes later, both looking as though life had no sorrow in store for them; for was not this the day of their triumph, the inauguration of an enterprise that should make them richer than King Solomon or the Queen of Sheba? Poor, poor things!

Needless to tell how I received them, and conducted them all over the locomotive shed and workshops, or to mention all the gracious and kindly compliments they paid me on my work. There are those who

say praise is disgusting,and unworthy of the consideration of a true man. For my part, when the praise comes from the right lips, and is such as the conscience tells you is deserved, I think there is hardly a greater pleasure on earth.

The five engines were steamed out for the inspection of the Court, and then Coupled together and made to run half a mile out and back again. The two finest were named Maximilian and Charlotte, and his Majesty was pleased to insist that a third should bear my plain Saxon name, John Brown. All being ready, the engine Charlotte was Sent on with a van containing the ice and other perishables for the lunch which Was to take place at Mestra, John Brown Went on as a pilot, and the Court having entered a train of saloon carriages, I mounted on Maximilian, blew the whistle, and started.

The long uphill journey occupied two hours, but you must remember that we had to ascend nearly three thousand feet in forty miles. I do not think the Imperial party were bored. The wildness of the scenery, the sharp curves, and the hazardous declivities along which we passed, struck me as they had never done before with a feeling of wonder at the audacity of man to penetrate and subdue nature in her wildest nooks—to traverse chasms on airy wires, or hang on a mountain-side like flies on a window-pane. Some old lines forgotten since my schooldays kept drumming through my ears:

“Audax omnia perpeti
Gens humana ruit per vetitum nefas,”

and set themselves to the measured music of the labouring piston. They seemed to carry with them a sound of coming evil—of evil approaching with the certainty of fate, yet blindly brought on by man himself.

“Audax omnia perpeti—”

I thought of Pedro and his bold invention—

“Gens humana ruit——per vetitum
—nefas.”

But I soon roused myself from the reverie into which I was falling, as we came in sight of the poor shanties of Mestra, dominated by a large marquee gay with flags, where luncheon was Spread for the Court and guests. The gold diggers, poor fellows, had drawn themselves up in a line and welcomed the train with a cheer, which the Emperor and Empress acknowledged with bow and Smile. All the events of this day

dwell So clearly in my memory that I am tempted to linger over details. But in truth it is idle for me to describe what every reader will know as well as myself from a hundred similar festal occasions. How the Emperor examined the gold quartz, how he encouraged the diggers, how we ate, how speeches were made, and how after lunch the Emperor conferred on me an Order, the Empress pinning it on with her own fair hands—all these are matters on which I need not enlarge. Suffice it to say that the return journey was made without accident, and within the hour, and might have been quicker, were it not that the hint was passed to me that Her Majesty was rather nervous of high speeds over such airy paths; for the which I don't blame her.

The Royal party left immediately on our arrival, and him, at least, I saw no more alive. His wife, poor woman, I did once see, beside herself with grief, her brief dream of empire buried in a bloody tomb, about to leave the country where her murdered husband lay. The crowd which had gathered from all parts to see the sight was walking idly along the rail, or beginning to disperse in search of refreshment, when a sharp whistle recalled their attention. "Why, what's that?" I exclaimed; but before the words had passed my lips, the doors of the private shed slowly opened, and there emerged Pedro's monster, with himself sitting on it with an air of sublime indifference to all around him.

If the engine looked uncanny in repose, you will understand that it was not less so in motion. That peculiar movement of surprise which is described in police-court reports as a "sensation," passed through the throng. Presently, however, the engine gathering speed mounted the steep gradient with ease and rapidity and was lost to sight, reappearing here and there at distant points of the line that could be seen among the nearer hills. I thought it advisable to explain to the directors, who had mustered in force, that this was the handiwork of my assistant, who had entered it in competition for the five thousand dollar prize for the best gradient climbing engine. The directors Were evidently pleased at the ocular evidence of its powers.

"There is no other entry for this prize," said the chairman. "It seems to Me that your young friend has a walk over."

Needless to say I was delighted to hear this remark, which I considered as an informal award of the prize, and knowing how seriously Pedro must have involved his small fortune in producing his machine, I was certain that the money was of no small importance to him. But we were interrupted by a voice shouting "Here she comes!" And coming she was, but at slow pace, far slower than she ascended, and what was stranger she appeared to be engaged in some operation

besides that of locomotion. The chairman put a pair of race-glasses to his eyes ——

“Heavens!” he exclaimed, “she is tearing up the telegraph poles.”

And as she drew nearer and nearer, the fact became clear to every eye. “See!” shouted the crowd, “she is tearing up the telegraph poles.”

Now these poles were beautiful, straight and slender sticks, imported from Europe, intended to carry only two wires, and had been carefully prepared with creosote and every conceivable preservative against decay, the white ant, and other tropical pests. The contractor began to fidget, then to dance, then to tear his hair, and finally to swear in the Most voluminous terms, not only exhausting all the Spanish Saints, but drawing largely on Mexican mythology. And all the time the engine came slowly on, tearing up every post without missing one, and instantly reducing them to neat fire-billets.

At last the monster, having devoured the telegraph poles to the last stick, drew up at the station. The contractor, beside himself with fury, launched himself upon the rash inventor. I dragged him back by the collar. Pedro was radiant with triumph.

“I trust,” he said with a low bow to the directors, “that my engine has fulfilled the requirements of the Company.”

The chairman grunted, being in truth at a loss for a reply. He had been struck, as had every one present, with a sense of discomfort at seeing this lifelike monster tearing up the poles as food for its red-hot belly, much as the rustics of fifty years back must have been to see iron monsters rushing without apparent motive power through their peaceful fields. Besides, the loss was considerable, and could not fairly fall on the contractor.

“But why in the world,” said he at last, “did you not stop the engine from tearing up all our new telegraph poles?”

“Stop it, sir? Stop the engine? I couldn’t stop it. The machinery is automatic, and when once started no power can stop it, except perhaps a cannon-shot.”

The chairman grunted again, and appeared as though he would have made some further remarks. But Pedro was gone to groom his monster and put it to bed. In the evening he came to dine with me, glowing with excitement.

“I don’t think they can refuse me the prize,” he remarked.

“I think not,” returned I. “In fact, without any breach of confidence, I think I may tell you that the chairman said to me that you would have a walk over.”

We talked till a late hour. Never had

I seen Pedro so lively or so brilliant. He talked much of schemes that seemed to me quite Utopian, but in the face of his first success I was almost as credulous of the power of his genius as he was himself.

Late at night, just as we were parting, came a knock at the door. An official-looking person entered with a large envelope, endorsed with the seal of the Company.

“I think we can guess,” said I smiling, “what that contains.”

Pedro tore it open, read it, and flushed crimson. He read it again, and turned deadly pale. Then he handed the letter to me without a word. This is what I read:

“SIR,

“The directors beg to inform you that in the absence of any competition, they decline to assign the prize of five thousand dollars offered for the best gradient-climbing engine.

“The directors further have the honour to request you to remove your engine from their metals without delay.

“By order of the Direction,

(Signed) “Ituba, Secretary.”

Here was a knock-down blow!

CHAPTER IV: CONSEQUENCES

Poor Pedro! He had suffered the bitterest disappointment that can befall a man, that of losing the game at the moment when it appeared to be won. How he had worked at his new machine, how he had spent himself and his fortune in the endeavour to perfect it, enduring for months the painful uncertainty whether after all it might not prove a failure; then on the day of trial to be lifted to a pinnacle of success beyond his hopes, only to be dashed down into a gulf of despair! He Sat opposite to me with a blank look on his face, uttering not a word. I felt obliged to say something, lest from brooding in silence his wits should totter.

“Have you sacrificed much capital in prosecuting your invention?”

“Everything. My land is mortgaged beyond its value. The mortgagees have been kept from immediate foreclosure by the knowledge that my engine was complete, and that there was no other entry for the Company’s prize. When my failure is known, as it will be to-morrow, I shall be sold up, and shall not be worth more than the clothes I stand in.”

“As long as I am employed on the railway you shall be too. But, Pedro, I have a suggestion to make, if you will listen to me.”

“Name it,” he replied gloomily.

“It is this. I am sure there was a prejudice felt against your machine owing to its ogrish way of devouring those telegraph poles. I heard more than one voice say, ‘It is a demon.’ Now that feeling may be very unreasonable and absurd, but I am convinced that it has been the cause of this letter.”

“Well, your suggestion—?”

“Is that you should take off those self-feeding appliances, and relying upon the real merits of your engine as a gradient-climber, enter it again for the prize. I did not fail to observe the ingenious method by which the wheels gripped the metals so as to obtain so rapid a power of ascent.”

During my speech Pedro had risen from his seat, and now spoke with a hoarse voice.

“Do you really suppose that after devoting my time, my labour, my fortune, aye, after putting my WHOLE HEART into this machine, I will ever consent to Strip it of its special pride? Rather plunge it into the

deepest chasm in the mountains. Since that is the best advice you can give me I will go. I must see Inez."

"Do," said I, feeling that if any one could console him it would be the incomparable girl to whom he was deeply attached. "I gave you the advice I thought best in a pecuniary point of view, but I cannot feel surprised that you do not adopt it."

"Could I even humiliate myself to seek the favour of the men who have insulted me by this rag?" he continued, tossing the paper on the table. "Could I even work for them another day— another hour? No, I appreciate your kindness in offering me employment with the Company, but my work for them is ended." And without another word he broke from the room, and strode rapidly out into the night.

His manner made me feel anxious, but I comforted myself with the thought that he was going to the best quarter for consolation, and that the gentle hand of his sweetheart would bind up the wounds of that wild heart.

To some men the cool air and solitary walk would have brought calmness, but to my poor Pedro the more the night breeze cleared his fevered brain, the grosser appeared the outrage perpetrated by the directors.

"The wretches!" he hissed between his teeth. "Oh, if I could meet that sleek chairman in the street this moment, and alone!"

The result was that he arrived at the house of his beloved in a far more excited state than he had left mine. Inez was alarmed at his aspect. "My dear Pedro, what is it? what has happened?" she cried.

In wild words and with wilder gestures he told his story, and on this occasion the few words she said in the endeavour to soothe him had a precisely contrary effect. At last she spoke out.

"I confess, Pedro, that while I admired your wonderful cleverness and genius, I Shared the feeling of the directors and the crowd when I saw your engine tearing up those poles like a wild beast, or Worse. Everybody shuddered, and I heard many say 'It is possessed by Satan.' Of course that is nonsense, but what Seemed so horrible to me was the idea that a human being, a poor child, perhaps, might get within reach of those terrible arms."

"And I wish they would," cried he with a curse. "Oh! if I could only get that chairman within ten feet of the rails. That would be a revenge worth having."

Inez looked deeply distressed and hurt. "Pedro, you do not, you cannot mean what you are saying. If you did, I could never love you

again."

"I do mean it," cried he fiercely, "I mean every word. Did I say I should like to have him within reach of my engine? No, I would have a better revenge than that. I would have those pink-cheeked children of his turned into fuel before his eyes; then his baby-faced wife, and when he had endured more than the bitterness of death itself, he should be the last victim."

Inez rose. Her face was deadly pale. She spoke plainly, but in a very low tone.

"Señor da Luz, you know I have loved you with all my heart. But this night I have looked into the depth of your cruel Soul. There can be no more love between us, no more friendship; I can feel nothing but horror for a man who has given utterance to such thoughts as I have heard from you. Farewell!" Her Voice had sunk almost to a whisper, and She waved her hand towards the door. Pedro gave a vacant glance at her, and hurried from the house, slamming the outer door behind him.

Poor Inez had fainted dead away.

CHAPTER V: LOST

Pedro came to my office the next morning at the usual hour. Of course I knew nothing of his interview with Inez, but I was glad to see that he appeared calm and resigned, though he spoke and moved with an air of depression.

“The Company want me to remove my engine at once from the metals,” said he “It is very inconvenient, and I don’t know what to do with it. Don’t you think that if I were to write them a civil letter asking their permission to keep it for the present in the private shed they might consent?”

“Certainly I do,” I replied. “In fact they could hardly refuse. But if you like I will back your application in person or by letter.”

“Thank you; then if you will give me paper and ink I will write at once.” And to my great surprise he indited a polite and even humble letter, regretting that the Direction had not seen their way to award him the prize, and requesting that he might be allowed to keep his machine in its present place until he could make arrangements for its removal. It was impossible to refuse a petition so worded, and the consent of the Board arrived in an hour, not too graciously conveyed.

I was anxious to get Pedro some regular work, but though he did and readily did a few odd jobs for me, not an item would he touch of the Company’s business. I prevailed on him to take his meals with me, pleading loneliness and want of company, but fearing in reality that he would otherwise be in danger of going without meals altogether. All his leisure he would spend locked up alone with his engine, but whether altering it, or, as I rather believed, brooding over his misfortunes, I could not say.

Weeks passed away, but not so Pedro’s melancholy, which rather deepened as time went on. I was busy finishing the further section of the line to Santa Fé, and before long this also was ready for traffic. There was no royal visit or festivity to celebrate this second occasion. The golden vision was already vanishing, and when as before I drove the first train over the new metals, I only found an emaciated company of heart-broken gold-seekers anxious to return, a few to try the fields at Mestra, but the majority eager to migrate to California, Australia—anywhere. It was a sad thought that all my work and zeal should have been for nothing. Yet after all what is success or failure? The reward of true work lies in the consciousness of having done it well.

"'Tis not in mortals to command success
We will do more, Sempronius,—we'll deserve it."

But the work for which I came being completed, the question presented itself whether I was to stay in Mexico and make my home there, or seek a new field for work? Up till a few months back I had no doubt as to my future; but now the political sky was overcast, and already could be heard the mutterings of the storm which was to sweep the sovereign from, the throne. It was rumoured that the Government of the United States, free from their civil dissensions, would no longer brook the presence of European troops on the North American continent, and that the French Emperor —yes the godlike Napoleon!—felt himself unable to resist their pressure. And if the French troops were withdrawn, no one who knew Mexico could believe that Maximilian would long sit on his throne.

I had by this time discovered the breach between Pedro and Inez. The poor girl had fallen into a severe illness in consequence of their quarrel, and in her delirium she would cry, “Oh! Pedro, Pedro! Oh! Mother of God, let me die,” in accents which tore the heart of her mother and nurses. She did not die, however, but her recovery was very Slow, the strength of a youthful constitution winning its way against the odds of a terrible nervous shock. Moreover the wish to recover was wanting, which makes a great difference.

I never spoke to Pedro on the subject of Inez but once, on which occasion he shook his head and sighed, but gave me to understand that the breach was irremediable.

One day he came to me with his usual Melancholy gait, and saying, “It has come at last,” threw me a blue envelope With a seal such as I have mentioned before. It contained a letter saying that the Señor da Luz having had ample time to make his arrangements, the Board had the honour again to request him to remove his engine from their premises.

“I expected it,” he continued. “Indeed I have been surprised they have left me alone so long. Happily I have had time to perfect my machine beyond all comparison with its condition at the time of the trial trip. However, I must remove it now, and myself with it, and I am come to say good-bye.”

“But where will you go, Pedro, and what am I to do without you? And how will you get the means to transport your engine? Take me into your confidence, my dear lad.”

“All is arranged,” he replied dreamily, “I cannot tell you yet, but when I am in another country you shall hear. Yes,” he continued more confidently, “you will certainly hear of my machine, if not much of

me. One thing I want to ask of you. Keep the key of the private shed to yourself. Go there sometimes, and you may find something that will remind you of me."

I acquiesced in this singular request, and he wrung my hand.

"You are my only friend, Juan," said he. "From you I have received nothing but kindness, and my great grief in leaving you is that I lose the only chance I might have had of repaying it."

"Then stay," said I, catching at any excuse to keep him.

"No, my dear Juan, I will no longer inflict my melancholy on you who have borne with it so patiently. But if we never meet again, try and think of me as One who with all his faults could appreciate a real friend."

"Good-bye, Pedro," said I, feeling ready to cry.

"Good-bye, Juan." And he was gone. The next morning both Pedro and his engine had disappeared. But whither? It was no easy matter to remove so large an object without leaving any trace. The workpeople whispered that both inventor and machine had been borne away by the Evil One to whom they belonged.

That explanation did not satisfy me, and eventually I hit on what I was persuaded was the right one, viz., that during all these weeks Pedro had been engaged in dismantling his engine, and getting it carted away piecemeal on board a vessel which had been lying waiting for a cargo at a neighbouring port. No doubt he had taken a passage on the same ship himself.

Two days after his departure, however, we had news of him. A disappointed gold-seeker from Mestra had started homeward and been overtaken by a dense mist in which he had lost his way, so far mistaken his route, that when the weather cleared he found himself a dozen miles nearer Santa Fé. Knowing that if he found the railway he could make no further error, mist or no mist, he struck across the hills till he came to the new but already deserted line. He had not followed the iron road for half a mile, when he discovered the body of a young man with a knife in his heart, and his right hand firmly gripping the haft. At once the conviction flashed through my mind that this was my unhappy friend.

In any case I must know. Summoning an engine that happened to have steam up I jumped on board, signed to the digger to follow, and started off at the highest speed. Oh, how that engine crawled up the weary slopes of my line. It took two hours to get to Mestra, and half an hour to the point beyond Where the corpse lay, and all that time

the conviction deepened in my mind whose body I should see on arrival, till the suspense was exchanged for a sensation almost of relief, when I saw my poor friend lying, save for that deadly pallor and that crimson stain, as if in sleep.

Tenderly we raised him and placed him on the tank, covering his form with a tarpaulin, and then let the engine go at lightning speed down the rapid slope. My thoughts were elsewhere, but it happened that we both noted the time, and found that the fifty-two miles down to Xiqipu were covered in forty minutes.

The rumour that Pedro was dead and that I had gone to bring in his body had Spread throughout the town, and as we drew near we saw a crowd gathered, watching with astonished eyes our headlong descent. The first face I recognised was that of Inez, who though she had not quitted her room since her illness could not be prevented from making her way to the station to learn the truth or untruth of the report. Poor girl, how changed she was. The engine drew up opposite to where she stood, and without a word she stepped to its side, and before I could prevent it drew the tarpaulin from the face, and gazed long in silence. Not a breath was heard from one in that concourse. Then she replaced the cloth, and murmuring, “Ay! lo he matado!” “Alas, I killed him!” made towards the crowd, which parted respectfully to let her pass.

Pedro was buried the next day. The priests at first refused to lay him in consecrated ground or perform any of the rites of the church over him, first because he had died by his own hand, secondly because he was more than suspected of being in league with the devil, but I made interest in high quarters and obtained an Archiepiscopal order (by telegraph) that the minor rites were to be used—those which the Church of Rome grants to such of her children as die without the sacraments. Inez persisted in following the body. Not a tear did she shed, not a Sigh did she breathe; but she went home to her chamber and never left it again. A month afterwards she lay beside her lover,

I made inquiries about the trading vessel, but found that no machinery had been sent on board. So adopted another theory, that Pedro had travelled up on his engine to the point where his body was found, and then let it run on, and it had broken down at the Sante Fé terminus, or fallen over an embankment; or perhaps he had himself sent it down a chasm, as he had said he would do, rather than Mutilate to please the Railway Board.

CHAPTER VI: RUMOURS

I sought relief from the painful memories of these events by plunging into a course of hard work. A new line, more useful but less enterprising than that to the Eldorado, was to be constructed to carry the produce of a grain-producing district to a neighbouring port, and to this I was appointed engineer. It was completed Without incident, and there being in Mexico a scarcity of locomotives, and total absence of means for producing such things, I brought four away from Xiqipu, leaving one only to serve the possible needs of Mestra. But indeed Mestra was now all but deserted, the report being that there was no one left but an old man who kept goats, and who required no train service; so the one engine left behind—I regret to say it was my god-child, John Brown—soon became rusty and unworkable under the continued neglect of the native driver.

I was too far away from my old station to hear anything of my former acquaintances, and too busy to make inquiries, and it was not till more than a year after my departure that I determined to pay a visit to my old haunts to see if I could not remove some of the plant, as well as my namesake the John Brown which was rusting there, to a sphere where it might enjoy honourable employment. I walked some way up the village street before I saw a familiar face. At last | met a man who had worked under me at the ledgers.

“Why, Rodriguez,” said I, “what, man, you have not forgotten me?”

He gave a start, and then said with an effort, “No, no, of course not, Mr. John Brown, but the fact is we have had such terrible scares here, that I for one have become unnaturally nervous.”

“Scares? what scares?”

“Is it possible you have not heard? Ever since you left we have been subject to periodic visitations from—what-”

“Well, from what?”

He looked cautiously over his shoulder. “From the demon!” he whispered.

“Demon be hanged!” said I. “Are you out of your mind?”

“Ah, you may laugh, señor, but if you had seen what I have seen—”

“What have you seen?”

“Hush, señor, don’t speak like that, we are too near the railway; come with me,” and taking my arm, with hasty pace he dragged me to an

outdoor seat under a tree on the outskirts of the little town.

“Is it possible you have not heard?” he asked again. “But I see you have not. Well then, you remember the assistant engineer, Don Pedro da Luz?”

“Remember him! I should think so, poor fellow!”

“Poor fellow! you say. Señor, what some of us suspected in his life has been conclusively proved since his death, that he had direct dealings with Satan. His body has been torn up from the grave, burnt, and the ashes scattered to the four winds. Even this has not put a stop to his foul sorceries.”

My cheek glowed with indignation at this cowardly outrage to my poor friend’s remains. “Had I been here,” I cried, they should have burnt me first.”

“Señor, you know not what you say. Wait till I tell you. You remember the opening of the line to Mestra, when the Emperor came here?”

“Yes.”

“Well, after His Majesty’s departure, do you recollect that Don Pedro came from the shed yonder on a thing he called an engine, but which many of us even then recognised for a work of the Archenemy?”

“Come now, Rodriguez,” I said, “you were wont to be a sensible man, and you know as well as I do that Pedro’s invention was a mere engine made of iron and Steel, and worked by steam.”

Rodriguez shook his head. “Wait till I tell you more. After Don Pedro's suicide the machine disappeared with him, and many of us thought it had gone back to hell whence it came. Would it had! would it had! But no, it has remained on earth to plague and terrify us, sinful men that we are.”

“But you tell me nothing about it. What have you seen or heard that makes you talk in this wild way?”

“Too much, too much, señor! Things that make the hair white, and the limbs fail. Give me time, and I will tell you.”

He ran his fingers through his hair, shivered perceptibly, and commenced again.

“It must be a year ago now that I had gone up to the mountains to gather some of the medicinal gentian, from which I have a receipt for distilling a spirit which drives away ill humours. I searched the spots where I had found it most abundant in previous years, but gathered but little, and wandered on farther than my wont. Gradually I drew near the railway, which was then, as now, all overgrown with grass

and weeds. Suddenly close to the line I came upon a rich growth of the herb, and soon was busy filling my basket. I was startled by a sudden scream and rush close to me. It was the demon——"

"In other words the engine."

"No, señor, but the *demon* which had suddenly turned a corner and was close beside me. It fascinated me with its fiery eyes: I stood spell-bound; when just as it came level with me, I saw it dart forth a horrible arm of steel to clutch me. Sick with terror, I shrieked and fell backwards and so saved my life. The claw caught my watch-chain, tearing it away, and with a howl of disappointment the monster rushed on."

He paused. "Is that all?" I asked.

"Is that all? Holy Virgin! A Christian and a Spaniard is nearly made mincemeat by a demon, and he asks "Is that all?" But it is not all. The poor old goat-herd who lives at Mestra was driving down his flocks one day, when the monster rushed in and killed seven or eight, besides making many more cast their kids. He has been silly ever since."

"Anything more?"

"Heavens! what does the man want? Aye, more, much more. The telegraph poles, which were replaced, are more than half of them destroyed. The demon is rushing up and down the country still. Twice it has come down here to Xiqipu. And at night, sir. The station-keeper was raised from his sleep by a Satanic scream. He saw the demon's fiery eyes coming through the darkness, and not knowing what he did, flung the bolster straight at it. In a moment this was clutched and torn to atoms; and then, señor, what then? Why, instead of dashing itself to pieces against the buffers as any mere engine would have done, it stopped, turned round, and with another shriek fled back to its mountains. Ha, sir, do you believe now?"

"Rodriguez," said I, "all you have told me is very interesting, but only proves that Don Pedro's engine does all he intended it to do. Every one of these motions you have described he carefully explained to me before his death. I am no Catholic, much less a priest, but I will face this so-called demon of yours and show you that I am not afraid of it."

"No doubt, no doubt," muttered Rodriguez. "Heretic and demon, birds of a feather; can Satan be divided against Satan? Not afraid! No true Catholic would dare to say as much."

"What are you muttering, Rodriguez?"

"Twas saying, señor, that the matter has come to such a pass that the

whole country-side is being deserted. As a last resource, the Bishop of the diocese and the Fathers of the Redemptorist order are coming out to exorcise it, and we shall see which is the stronger, the Kingdom of God, or the Kingdom of Satan. To-morrow being one of the festivals of the Madre di Dios, has been appointed for the ceremony." / "Indeed! I shall certainly be present."

"Have a care, sir. I have always had a kindly feeling for you, but I think it only right to warn you that our people are very pious, and ——"

"Well?"

"And if the rumour were spread that you were a heretic, and in league with the demon, they might——"

"Tear me to pieces! Not unlikely. Thank you for the warning, Rodriguez. Well, we shall see how the Church comes out of the contest. If she fails, science must try."

CHAPTER VII: THE CONTEST

The morning dawned of just such a day as that on which we opened the line to Mestra, a day of scorching but not muggy heat, such as offered a fair trial of strength between the rays of the Sun and the resisting power of the human frame. I was up with the daylight, and going to my window was surprised to see the street full of people awaiting the arrival of the bishop and the Redemptorist Monks who were to travel to Xiqipu by night in order to allow along day to go in quest of the monster. Presently a carriage-and-pair arrived, containing a swarth, clean-shaved, rather greasy-looking man in a shovel hat, lolling back in his scat, attended by an extremely ascetic, emaciated figure, that sat bolt upright. I could not help thinking of the advertisement of somebody's "Antifat," with a double picture marked, "Before and After." These two figures were the bishop and his confessor. Three more carriages followed, containing in all twelve reverend fathers.

I hurried on my clothes and hastened to the station to see if it were possible to get ready the engine "John Brown," for I considered that if Pedro's machine were at a distant part of the line, it would be necessary to convey the distinguished party to the scene of action. On inquiry however, I found that the worthy ecclesiastics would rather have walked the whole way than trust themselves on the same metals on which the demon was at large. This was lucky, as I very much doubted whether "John Brown" could have been induced to stir.

After a reasonable interval for breakfast, the party again got under weigh about 6 o'clock, but a large number of the inhabitants had started on foot at an earlier hour so as to get a good start. Many had come from a distance to witness the anticipated victory of the Church, and horses and conveyances Streamed out in a lengthy caravan. The bishops and monks drove at first, followed by lay brothers leading their mules, which they mounted as soon as the road became too steep and rough for wheeled traffic. A sumpter-mule carried the bishop's canonicals and objects necessary for the function of exorcism. I was fortunate enough to borrow a horse from Rodriguez, who declared himself unable to face the sight of the monster again.

Hot and weary was the journey up the wretched stony mountain path and frequent were the halts, so that the foot-passengers had little difficulty in keeping abreast of the cavalcade. It was really unconscionable of the devil to give all these clergy so much trouble. And yet it did not appear to me that there was any eager anxiety on

the part of the churchmen to tackle their foe.

A halt was made for a dinner, and then the long procession moved onward once more. By four o'clock we had traversed nearly thirty miles, men, women and even young children haying covered this distance on foot, with the aid of many rests and an occasional mount from a good-natured rider, in order to see this great sight. It was decided to make an hour's halt here, and then if the monster did not come, to give up the enterprise for the day. I could see some clerical faces which devoutly hoped for such an issue.

The bishop dismounted, the Redemptorists did the same; the bishop's canonicals were unpacked and laid ready to be put on at a moment's notice. The monks then sang a Litany in very curious Latin, composed for the occasion by one of their number. I recollect some of the verses —

"Contra monstrum horridum,
Quale fecit Sathanas
Ignem spirans gutture,
Adjuva nos, Domine.
"A fumosis faucibus,
Igneis ab oculis,
Ferreisque brachiis
Libera nos, Domine."

The Litany was long, and being sung to a monotonous chant produced on me a soporific effect. When I woke from my doze, the chanting had ceased, and the crowd, from want of occupation, was becoming mischievous. I perceived their attention was directed towards me.

"Look at him," one was saying, "asleep, while every good Catholic is Obeying the command to watch and pray."

"Aye," continued another, "we see the consequence of bringing heretics into our good country of Mexico. First the heretic, then the demon. What do you say, Father Alonso?"

"My children, all heretics are under the direct protection of Satan. That is why they have such wonderful magical powers of dealing with the elements of earth and air, of fire and water. Their master, Beelzebub, is called in Scripture, 'The Prince of this World,' and the 'Prince of the power of the Air.' Fire, too, is his natural element; that is why they have been taught the hellish art of devising monsters, stuffed with fire and steam, which shall one day be cast, with their inventors, into the bottomless pit."

"But why does our Emperor—why does the Archbishop allow such

things in a Christian land?"

"Alas, my children, it is the old story—the world, the flesh, and the devil. Princes wish to stand well with the rest of the world; they wish to grow rich and great; the devil persuades them to be reckless and turn a deaf ear to Holy Church."

"But, Father, if we were to destroy the heretics and their inventions, should we be rid of this plague?"

"Doubtless—doubtless this demon is allowed to ravage the land because we have given way to these heretical devices!"

I was sufficiently awake to hear this ominous conversation without having opened my eyes. I could hear that the crowd was gathering round with sinister intentions. I sprang to my feet, and the crowd started.

"See the heretic is awake! Oh, Satan protects his own.

"Kill him—burn him—tear him to pieces—cast out demons and heretics—he is accursed—listen to Father Alonso," such and many more were the muttered exclamations round. Some were putting their hands to the knives in their belts, and it wanted only a signal to send a hundred blades at my throat. It was necessary to act promptly.

"Father Alonso," said I, "don't you think it would be best, as I am the only person here who understands these engines, to protect me from the mob, so that in case the bishop and the fathers fail to extinguish the monster, the heretic engineer may try his hand? You see if it is true, as you say, that Satan gives us this power over the machines, we have power to stop them as well as set them going."

The priest was impressed with this argument, and hesitated.

"Why have you not stopped it all this time then?" roared some of the crowd.

"Why! because I never knew till yesterday that the thing was still in existence. I have been away from these parts more than a twelvemonth."

The crowd growled.

"If," I continued, "if the bishop and the holy fathers fail to stop the career of the demon to-day, I will go and face it alone, and will not rest until I have got it under proper control, or destroyed it."

"He is right," said Father Alonso. "Spare him, and we shall see whether he can perform what he promises. If not, we can punish him still."

At these words some of the crowd seemed to relent, but from the background still came shouts of “kill the heretic—down with all heretics and demons,” and an ugly heave was made in my direction. I set my teeth and prepared for the worst. “Now, Father, save me,” I cried. The priest did what he could, but the crowd whose passions Were now aroused surged towards me. A big brigand-like Spaniard, with a knife in his hand, made a dash at me. I struck him with all my force on the forehead and sent him down. It is the only time I ever knocked down a man, and the crowd was checked for an instant. “Down with him,” they cried. “He has killed Lopez,—down with him —tear him to pieces!” And they surged towards me again. I gave myself up for lost, and was breathing a prayer to Heaven, when a wild shriek pierced the air, and in a moment the crowd had turned round with a stifled cry—“the Demon.”

Pedro’s engine had not failed to keep its appointment.

The bishop, looking very uncomfortable, was hustled into his gorgeous clothes; the monks, huddled together like a flock of sheep, followed him, and with hasty, trembling steps, approached the line down which the monster was rapidly advancing. Hurriedly his Reverence recited the office of Exorcism, and the monks, in season and out of season, ejaculated Amen and other pious phrases.

“Come,” I thought, “they are standing their ground better than I expected.”

But when the monster with a still more terrific scream, shot forth two mighty arms within a few yards from the clerics, their nerve failed. Flinging down his crosier, and with mitre flying in the air, the bishop rushed down the slope till he tumbled over his own vestments; the monks fled yelling after, and rolled pell-mell in an undignified heap to the bottom of the embankment. The crowd groaned.

But one brother of a stouter heart than the rest stood his ground like a rock. With a crucifix plied in both hands, he planted himself on the line right in front of the machine. All eyes were fixed on this daring man. The engine was only fifty yards from him—only twenty—only ten. Suddenly with a cry of terror the poor man dropped his crucifix and fell flat on his back, happily Just out of reach of the great arm which made a clutch above his body.

So far the incidents were rather comic. But the day was not to close without a sad tragedy.

The crowd was scattered over nearly a mile of ground, and owing to the curve of the line those lower down did not at first see the machine. When it came in sight, there was a cry, “Out of the way! Out

of the way! The Demon! The Demon!"

Men, women and children, skurried out of the way of the approaching monster and were soon at a safe distance. Then they looked back, to see one poor little boy of some nine years standing open-mouthed and fascinated, close beside the iron rails.

"Come down, come down, Ruy," shouted his father, wildly. "Come down, Ruy," echoed on all sides. But the mother did more than shout. With incredible speed, she rushed up the steep incline. Little did she care for demons when her child's life was at stake. "She will be too late! too late!" gasped the crowd. "No, Mother of God, she is in time!"

The poor woman grasped the arm of her son, and was in the act of swinging him out of danger, when like lightning one of the giant arms was projected forth and the poor child was torn out of the mother's grasp. Ah! cruel spectacle! In another moment its poor little limbs were chopped up and piled in the tender, while the engine with a snort of triumph rushed on.

The unhappy mother had fallen down on the bank. When they raised her up she was dead.

CHAPTER VIII: ENGINE V. ENGINEER

The sickening event recorded in the last chapter inspired me with a horror of Pedro's machine almost as intense as that felt by the native Mexicans, Who believed it to be really possessed by a devil. It was a hateful thought that a monster such as this, which seemed to combine the ferocity of a wild beast and the merciless inevitableness (so to speak) of a piece of mechanism, should rush up and down the country, seizing living human souls and turning their warm and breathing frames into food for its murderous belly. Armed with my science, I had little doubt I should give a better account of the enemy than the Church with all her spiritual panoply of proof. Nor was there wanting in my mind curiosity to examine closely the wonderful mechanism by which Pedro had obtained such results.

After killing the poor child in the manner described, the engine rushed down into the station at Xiqipu, reversed itself, and proceeded again on its upward path. There, however, it was seen by many who were anxiously awaiting the issue of the conflict, and when it was observed to be splashed with blood a groan of horror thrilled through the bystanders, and the report was rapidly spread that the Bishop and all the Fathers had fallen victims to their zeal. Nor was it until the return of these churchmen

"In other guise than forth they rode"

that the true story was credited.

The crowd was melting away in the direction of the town, and many whose enthusiasm had carried them out the long thirty-mile walk found their limbs fail them on the return journey, and encamped perforce where they happened to be. I remained by the scene of the accident, revolving in thought the various methods by which I might easiest overcome the monster. A distant whistle reminded me that it was returning. I at once took my measures.

"Here you big fellows," I said to a group of hulking loafers who were Smoking long cheroots and discussing the events of the day, "I want you to help Me disable the demon. Will you come?"

The ducks which Mrs. Bond invited to execution cannot have looked more amazed at the proposal.

"Are we archangels," said one "that you think that we can cope with the arch-fiend, who has already defeated the Fathers of the Church

and torn a lamb from the flock in spite of their teeth?"

"Pooh! I only want you to lay that large tree"—pointing to one which had been uprooted in a gale—"across the line so as to throw the engine off."

They looked at me as if in admiration of my boldness and resource, but muttered that they would not deal with such matters.

"Come, be good fellows," I pleaded, "I will give you a dollar apiece." This caused some sensation, but no one moved until at last a man of sea-faring appearance asked:—

"Will you come and bear a hand yourself, sir?"

"To be sure I will."

"Then here goes. If a heretic can't protect a man against a devil what does he sell his soul for, I should like to know?" (The old superstition again.) "Come along Diaz, and you, José, and you Pablo and half a dozen more of you. A dollar isn't gained every day for ten minutes' work." And in five minutes a dozen of us were heaving at the massive tree. It would not move. "Two dollars apiece to all who help," I shouted. Then I got volunteers enough. We raised the great log on our shoulders and bore it to the line.

At that moment the scream of the engine was heard just coming round a curve of the road. Did you ever see a crowd of rabbits scamper into their burrows when they suddenly see a sportsman close beside them? That is how my workmen scuttled, dropping the tree, which fortunately fell with its root across one of the metals. I stood still, startled by the suddenness of the stampede, then suddenly remembering the long reach of the steel arms removed myself some yards from the line. The engine came on rapidly. In another instant I should see it strike on the tree and roll over.

Great Heaven! This is more wonderful than ever. On arriving within sight (if I may say so) of the log, the engine suddenly shut off steam, reversed her lever, put on the brakes hard—I could hear them grinding and see the sparks fly—and brought up just in time to avoid a catastrophe, the front bogy-wheel actually touching the tree as it stopped. Then with a snort as of defiance it moved slowly backwards, driving clouds of steam from the cylinders. I was thunder-struck. Could it be that these simple Catholics were right, and I, in the pride of my science, wrong in scorning their notion of Satanic possession? I could not think so. And yet how to account for this marvellous power of self-preservation shown by the—the creature, I was about to call it.

I was driven to take refuge in the very unsatisfactory explanation that it had stopped there by accident, or owing to some peculiarity of the road. I could soon try.

“Come, you fellows, and help me again for five minutes.”

But no one moved, and it was only by great persuasion that I induced three or four of the boldest to join me. Together we heaved the tree out of the track.

Presently the engine approached, slowly and cautiously, sniffing and snorting as though it scented danger. It was hardly moving four miles an hour.

All at once it seemed to perceive that the line was clear, and with a wild discordant whistle it put on full steam and rushed like a frightened horse away into the mountains.

“Well!” I said, “did ever mortal see the like of that?”

“No, Señor, never, save when the devil walked the earth.”

I was rapidly coming round to his opinion. But no, as a mechanician cool-headed and unimaginative, could I believe that the machine was greater than its maker—the creature than the creator—the engine than the engineer? I determined I would conquer it or it should destroy me.

The night had fallen with tropical suddenness, and the question of a night’s lodging must be promptly settled. With the aid of three or four of my late assistants, who seemed to feel a certain protection in my presence, I gathered brushwood and lighted a good fire round which we lay, and in spite of the sensations of the day were soon asleep.

I woke betimes the next morning, and found my seafaring friend already astir.

“Xavier,” said I (such was his name, and he was of French extraction), “Xavier, the demon was too clever for us yesterday.”

“Aye, Señor, and will be to-day and to-morrow and ever, I fear.”

“We shall see; I am determined to go through with the matter. The difficulty is, I must have help. Now all these fellows are cowards, and you are the only man amongst them. Will you help me?”

Flattery is as sure a stimulus to a Frenchman as a good dinner to an Englishman. He swore roundly that he would stand by me to the death.

“We will hope it won’t come to that,” I replied. “Now, then, that I have got your valued assistance, I don’t mean to lose an hour. We

must go down to Xiqipu."

We got there comparatively early in the day—that is, about three in the afternoon—and I at once set to work, my impatience getting the better of my fatigue. I sent Xavier to purchase a quantity of blasting powder, which I knew could be obtained, as it was in demand for quarrying. I ordered two former stokers of the line to clean up poor John Brown, and see if he could be induced to travel. I went myself to the chemist's and bought a quantity of nitric acid. Then I turned into what had been the Station Telegraph Office, and rummaged among the corroded batteries, finally selecting one of the cleanest, which I proceeded to empty out and free from the chemical mess of which it was full. The zinc plates I laid carefully aside. I had determined to employ what is called a "Grove's Battery,' that being the most powerful known. For this I required some sheets of platinum, and of these I knew there was a store in the private shed which I doubted not to find intact.

I took the key, which I had constantly carried in my pocket, and having oiled it so that it might turn more ready in the rusty lock, walked over to the shed which I had last entered with my poor friend Pedro da Luz.

I entered. Everything was exactly as I had last seen it. How his looks, his manner, his words recurred to me What was it he had said when he gave me the key—that I should find the place remind me of him? True, most true.

I found the platinum plates lying bright and untarnished by their year's idleness, just where I had left them; and what was equally important to me, a quantity of fine platinum wire. Of this I took a foot or two. Copper wire I had and to spare in the telegraph office.

I sat down on Pedro's low bench for a moment, in order to count the plates and cut the wire, when, bump! the bench turned over and deposited me on the ground. When I got up I perceived that on the under side of the bench, now uppermost, was nailed with four tacks a small sheepskin letter-case, inscribed— yes, inscribed with my name. Extracting the tacks with my knife, I opened it, and found it to contain a number of sheets like a letter, except in the matter of length, beginning, "My dear friend Juan," and signed "Your devoted and affectionate Pedro da Luz." I was far too eager with my practical scheme against Pedro's engine to devote the needful time and patience to study this document—doubtless a long and sad recapitulation of his sorrows—and feeling besides that what had waited twelve months for a reader might very well bide another day, I crushed the sheepskin case into my pocket.

My next operation was to return to the telegraph office, light a small stove, and solder a short piece of platinum wire to two long coils of copper wire covered with silk, This was to form a fuse, and in case of accidents I formed two. I then proceeded to the locomotive shed, where I found the stokers had managed to put John Brown in motion, though he was rather wheezy and shaky in the joints. On my way back I met Xavier, who carried two small kegs under his arm, and explained to me that the law of Mexico forbade the vendors to sell more than one small keg to any individual, and I had asked for double the quantity.

“So you see, Señor, I had to buy one for myself and one for you.” I laughed at this ingenious evasion of the law. I had only to connect the zinc and platinum plates for the battery, order the stokers to light the engine fires at four, tell Xavier to come and bring two shovels at five, and then turn in for some hours rest.

I spent the night in a hand-to-hand conflict with the engine!

CHAPTER IX: FOILED

In the morning I found Xavier ready with the shovel, and my namesake roaring and puffing out steam at every aperture. One would have said he was some “dragon of the prime” about to dispute for mastery with another dragon dwelling in the mountain caves. Certainly if there were such creatures one might fearlessly assert that they “were mellow music matched with him.”

We got the heavy battery on board, also the nitric acid, and the kegs of powder, and the fuses and the shovels, also the two stokers who had to ride on the tender, and finally Xavier and myself. We steamed away nobly, and were congratulating ourselves on the great improvement in this mode of progression over walking or mule-riding.

But, alas! faithless John Brown, to decline the combat. We were some twelve miles from the town, when a great burst of steam was followed by a stoppage of motion. A cylinder-head had blown off. There was nothing for it but to leave one of the stokers in charge, with full permission to run away if the demon came, and for the rest of us to plod onward under the weary weight of all the weapons of our warfare.

Xavier bowed himself between the powder kegs, the stoker struggled with the battery and acid, while I carried the shovels and wires, as well as the provisions we had provided for the journey.

Terribly slow and tiring was the march, and night fell before we had met with the monster. We bivouacked as we were, put ourselves on half rations, and next morning marched on. By mid-day we reached Mestra. There we found the flock of goats browsing, apparently untended.

We went from one to another of the deserted huts, looking for their master.

“Here he is,” cried Xavier at last.

We entered, but saw no one. At last our eyes fell on a dark corner. There was—not the man, but only his bleached bones! The white ants had picked off every particle of flesh—nothing foul and no smell being left.

We milked some of the goats, and found some cheeses in a tin box, which we took with us. And so we went on.

The scenery above Mestra grew each furlong more wild and fantastic.

At last I said—

“I think this is far enough. We must not let the monster pass us before we are ready.”

Under my directions the two men dug two small pits fifteen feet apart. I bored two holes in the tops of each keg, passed my fuses through, and then buried the kegs in the pits, passed the wires along, concealing them with gravel and grass, and brought the ends into the neighbourhood of the battery, which I then charged. One of each pair of wires I fastened to the zine or negative pole of the battery, the other I left free.

You will ask why I took all these precautions for concealment? Well, it had been borne upon me very strongly by my last experiment that the monster had some sort of instinct of danger. It certainly appeared in some unexplained way to perceive and turn away from the log I had placed in its path. Might it not be equally suspicious of a barrel of blasting-powder?

Our arrangements being completed, we lay down and discussed our cheese, and afterwards cigars. We were rather tired of waiting.

“I wonder whether it will come to-day?” said I, lazily.

Yes! The answer pealed sharply out of the rocky gorge above us. It would come to-day; nay, it was already here.

We sprang to our feet, and I laid hold of the wires, one in each hand, knowing that I had only to touch the platinum or positive pole of my battery and the circuit would be complete, the subtle current would run through the copper, be retarded by the resistance of the fine platinum wire, in overcoming that resistance would raise it to a red heat— and with a red-hot wire in the barrel of gunpowder, consequences are easily predictable.

Presently we caught sight of the monster. Not only so, but the monster seemed to have caught sight of us! Certainly, she at once shut off steam, and came on slowly and with caution.

Was it possible she recognized us as the persons who had tried to upset her three days before? Of course, on the demoniac hypothesis this was natural enough. But to my mind—no, it could not be.

We lay quite still, as though we were stalking deer, and the quarry was in sight. On she came, suspicious and unquiet, yet she did come on. Now she is but twenty-five yards off the mine,—now fifteen yards, now ten—oh, she crawls like a slug. Hours seemed to elapse: but now, oh, now she is over the first mine. If that doesn’t settle her she shall have the second—here goes— BANG!!!

When the dust cleared away I saw to my chagrin that the monster was speeding away to the mountains and had escaped me this second time. Not unscathed, however. Beside the line, in which was blown a yawning gap, lay a huge steel arm terminated in a giant claw, and still spotted with the blood of the poor child whom it had murdered. I went up to and examined it while my companions shuddered at my audacity. Now also I perceived the cause of my failure. In my hurry or excitement I had touched the battery with the wrong wire, and fired the forward mine, which had yet been sufficiently near to shatter the outstretched arm of the machine.

I was greatly chagrined at my failure, though in the eyes of my companions I appeared to have won high prestige. Where a bishop and twelve holy fathers had been routed, it was much to have gained even a partial success. But a new idea occurred to me. If the monster was really amenable to any human or indeed animal passions, it would be so scared by its narrow escape that it would have fled into the most distant recesses of its mountains—probably right up to Santa Fé.

“Follow me,” I said, and they picked up the apparatus and followed.

About three miles further on, I recollected there was a deep chasm, which I had bridged with a single arch of seventy feet span, smaller arches leading to it on each side. On reaching this we took the unused keg of powder which I had made the men dig up, adjusted the fuse, slung it carefully under one of the smaller arches, drew it up until it touched the summit, and retired to the end of the bridge. Then bringing the wires into contact with the terminals of my battery — BANG!-—and the arch was cleft, a shower of dust fell about our ears, and the echoes rolled up and down the mountains like a long thunder-peal.

“There, if we have not killed her,” cried I, “‘we have imprisoned her for life. The demon will come no more to Xiqipu.”

On getting back to the spot where I exploded the first mine, judge of our delight at finding the “John Brown” waiting to take us home. The stoker had returned for help and tools, got the cylinder head fixed on, and had followed us up until he was stopped by the gap we had blown in the line, where we found him and a companion admiring the great claw which already told them of our success.

“We will take that home as a trophy,” said I, smiling.

We sped rapidly homeward. The wonder and I may add the awe with which I was regarded was increased fifty-fold when we returned alive and bearing our spoils, and the merit of my performance lost nothing

in the telling when Xavier or the stoker were the narrators.

The sight of the private shed reminded me that I had not yet read Pedro's letter. I now recollected more distinctly his parting words. "You will find there something to remind you of me." He had not referred as I supposed to the associations that would be called up by the building where so many of his days had been spent, but to the document he had prepared and fixed so ingeniously to the reversible bench, on which he rightly argued I should be sure to sit as soon as I began to think of him.

I entered the private shed again, and locked myself in, wishing to be secure from interruption. I would read Pedro's letter in the place where Pedro had deposited it. First fixing the pivotted seat with a block of wood, I sat down once more.

This is what I read:

CHAPTER X: PEDRO'S LETTER

“My Dear Friend,

“When you find this, as find it no doubt you will, I shall have gone as I told you to a distant country; to a country where all doubts are resolved, all misunderstandings cleared up, and where partings of friends, whether bodily or mental, are at an end. I can no longer live, feeling that I have forfeited the love of my Inez. Had I the faintest hope of regaining it no trial would be too severe, no time of probation too long. But it is impossible, and the fault is my own.

“But I write this, not to dwell on my misfortunes, but to warn you of what it concerns you to know, and direct you how to deal with a matter to which your attention will most assuredly be called. I told you that though you would hear little more of me, you would have news of my engine. I am as sure of this as that you will one day find this letter of mine.

“You will remember how all my endeavours were directed to render the machine automatic, and how far I had succeeded at the time of the trial-trip. My work, during the past month, has vastly improved the self-acting character of the mechanism, but has, at the same time, developed a power unsuspected by me, but which bids fair to become formidable and dangerous.

“Do you remember how angry I was with the Directors when they refused my machine the prize? Unfair judges they certainly were, but I now see that they were wise in their generation, to reject a monster whose powers exceeded calculation, and which, though they did not know it, was soon to give proofs of independent volition!

“Independent volition, yes! I have done the imagined deed of Frankenstein!

“Listen, and you shall hear. One day, about three weeks since, I entered the shed. The engine fires which I had banked up the night before were still burning, but the tender was empty of fuel.

“As I passed through the door, what was my alarm when the great right arm of the engine made a vicious grab at me, which I only escaped by throwing myself under the wheels. Crawling under the engine, more dead than alive with the scare, I mounted on the platform and blew off all the steam, feeling that only by removing the motive power could I be secure from its uncalculated action.

“I was so alarmed, that it was some days before I ventured to light the

fires again. When at last I did so, it was with every precaution I could devise. Starting out at daybreak, to try the powers and watch the behaviour of this strange engine, I ran it out over the whole extent of the line, past Mestra, now peopled with its camp of gold seekers, to the deserted huts of Santa Fé. Nothing worth notice took place on the journey, the machine tore up a few trees for fuel and supplied itself with water from your tanks, or sometimes, as I had now arranged, from the ditches beside the railway. But as we were returning, the sky, which had exhibited a sultry stillness, had become black as night, and a hurricane was visibly approaching. I put on full steam, in hopes to reach shelter before its arrival. Soon, however, it broke in all its fury, yet still we tore onward at a reckless pace. Suddenly I felt our motion checked, with a click the reversing lever flew back, and I heard the grinding sound of the brakes clapped hard on the rushing wheels. In a few seconds we had stopped, and while I was wondering at the cause of this strange occurrence, I saw lying in our path a huge tree, torn up by its roots and prostrated by the typhoon. Remember that the gradient here was steep, and the engine's pace extreme, and account, if you can, for so strange an exhibition of automatism. I was myself half disposed to join the stupid mob in their cry, 'It is a demon.'

"But this is not all. I dismounted and with crowbar and lever worked at the log till after half an hour I had shifted it, inch by inch, off the line. On turning to my engine I was surprised to perceive the brakes taken off, the reversing lever restored to the forward position, and the machine already in motion. I had just time to clamber to the platform, when it accelerated its pace and dashed past the point where the obstacle had lain.

"The same thing happened three or four times, for the hurricane had caused great devastation along the course of the line, and wherever an obstacle lay in its way the engine invariably pulled up and moved on again of its own accord so soon as the road was clear.

"What was the meaning of this independent action? Neither you nor I, Juan, could admit the hypothesis of demoniacal possession. Some explanation consistent with the course of nature must be sought; and this I venture to think I have discovered.

"How to convey my theory to you? It must be by analogy.

"Physically speaking, what is man? A machine kept in motion or potential motion by an internal fire, which if it expires for want of fuel the man must die. The food he takes is the fuel, which is as surely consumed by the fire, that is by oxidation, as the coal or wood in an engine. And for every pound of true fuel, that is digested food, consumed, the man can do a certain measurable quantity of work, just

as my engine—all engines— can perform a certain quantity of work for every pound of wood burned in the furnace. But we may go further. Part of the human fuel is conveyed to the brain, and a portion of this is consumed or burnt for every exertion of the mind— every thought that flashes through the cerebral tissues.

“If, then, life is a question of the consumption of fuel—if thought itself be a function of matter, it follows that matter has only to be rightly disposed in order to produce life and thought.

“What an idea! and whither may it not lead future generations?

“It is a noteworthy fact, that the most perfect of mankind, those who perform their duties with the strictest regularity, tend to approach mechanical certainty, and their actions may be predicted like those of a locomotive, or a clock. ‘He is as regular as clockwork—as exact as a machine,’ say the friends of such an one.

“On the other hand, the most perfect of machines—mine, for example —seem to approach the animal world and mankind itself in the display of a certain real or apparent free-will.

“You now see at what I am aiming, viz., the theory that my machine possesses properties in some degree akin to organised creatures.

“Now, besides free will (which, after all, many philosophers tell us is merely apparent, all action being the necessary result of predisposing causes, and, therefore, inevitable as fate, or, rather, being fate itself), besides free will, I say, there are two properties which distinguish the organised world of living creatures from the dead or inorganic products of nature and of art. The one is the instinct and power of self-preservation; the other is the instinct and power of reproducing the species.

“Take the former. Why did my engine stop short upon a steep slope where a log was lying in its path? Why does a child or a dog avoid walking into the fire? Why does a moor-hen dive when she sees an enemy? ‘The answer is the same—from the instinct of self-preservation.

“And here I venture to remark that, contrary to what we might expect, the power appears to me to be developed first, the instinct afterwards.

“Why did my engine grab at me as I entered the shed? Why does a starving dog snatch a bone? From the same reason, because they are hungry: hunger being Nature's monitor that existence must be preserved by means of food or fuel.

“The power first, the instinct after. Had I not bestowed upon my engine the arms and appliances necessary to enable it to gather its

own food, is it likely it would ever have displayed the instinct to do so?

“And now let me ask you, supposing someone to invent a sentient being, or a machine that could live, what passion or instinct would you expect to see first developed?

“Surely, that of self-preservation.

“But now I imagine you to say: ‘Granted that you gave your machine the power to collect its own food (fuel), and that it has developed an instinct that enables it to make use of this power at the proper time, how does this account for its stoppage in sight of the fallen tree? Did you endow it with the power of vision, of reversing its machinery, of putting on brakes, and then taking them off again?

“Assuredly I did not. Not less certainly, the engine acted as I have described. Will you summon up courage to follow me through yet bolder speculations?

“Your great countryman, Darwin, has, I conceive, supplied me with the answer to this problem. Having shown us that in the organised world there is a constant tendency to improvement or variation, having for its object the preservation of the species, owing to the survival and greater vigour of those best adapted to their surrounding conditions, he also points out that even the individual has in a lesser degree the same capabilities of adapting its food, habits, &c., to circumstances. When he cannot get meat, the dog, a creature purely, carnivorous, will subsist on fruits and vegetables, nay, even upon nuts. Once more, what is the object of this faculty? Self-preservation.

“Here then we have the secret of continued existence in an organised body. Given life, two things are needful. First, capacity for self-nourishment; second, senses to perceive and power to avoid danger. Both these are parts of the same faculty: the instinct and power of self-preservation. The human child emerged from infancy displays both. Its feeble hands can put food into its tiny mouth. Its scarce-conscious mind protects it (as a rule) from falling into the fire.

“Thus then I have shown that two faculties, freewill, and self-preservation, are the first to display themselves in the living organism, and would be likely to be the first developed in an inorganic structure if it became endowed with life. Yes, development is the secret of the eccentricities of my machine. Nor will it stop here. I shall not live to see the further extension of its powers, but you will—you will.

“Now I come to the last and most marvellous sign of life in organised creatures; the power to reproduce species. Does my engine show any sign of that?

“I am thankful to say I have at present detected none. Thankful I say, because, if endowed with this last and greatest function, man would have to contend with a new and terrible enemy; and though I do not doubt that the unsurpassable brain of man would render him victor in the end, it might be only after a long and fearful struggle, after great sacrifice of life, and immeasurable suffering. Nay, in such a country as this, amid a population lazy, superstitious, improvident, who knows whether the issue would be in favour of the higher race? And so the whole fair country of Mexico might be abandoned to huge ferocious monsters of iron, and the only hope of humanity lie in their mutual destruction.

“But, as I said, of such reproductive power I see no sign. And indeed it seems to me that such power requires a certain dualism, which I have taken pains to eliminate in every way I could devise from my machine. I would not have my name descend to posterity as the deviser of a foe to man more terrible than wolf or bear or tiger.

“Yet you must remember the power which has developed so much may develop more than I can foresee or calculate. And if it does it will rest with you, if anyone, to check the mischief before it has gone too far. You have my free permission to do what I could not do my self, to destroy my engine whenever you consider it a source of danger to the country and its inhabitants.

“I have told you that I do not expect and have taken pains to prevent any such dangerous development. But looking into the future, can I doubt that what I with my twenty-five years have gone so far to achieve, will be accomplished by another, and that before a generation has passed?

“If not by my machine, yet some day, somewhere, this consummation will surely be attained. I have freed my conscience by warning you, it is for you to warn the world.

“We shall meet no more in this life. If the priests say true we shall meet in the world to come; for you as a heretic and I, by the act I am about to commit, are excluded for ever from paradise. But God is more just than the priests, and I may yet enjoy intercourse in a happier world with you, my only friend.

“Adieu.”

CHAPTER XI: WHICH WINS?

From the perusal of Pedro's letter, I sank back as if exhausted. Such a wave of new ideas had overwhelmed my brain as to produce a sensation resembling intoxication. True, his explanation seemed to bear with it convincing weight, and to abolish for ever all foolish superstitions about satanic possession; but my mind recoiled from the terrible consequences which his theory if correct foreshadowed. If engines, ships, machines of all sorts, were really capable of attaining powers similar to those exhibited by living creatures—not life; no, I could not yet admit the possibility of their winning the divine gift of life—but if they were to attain to this quasi-life, what responsibility rested upon us engineers, whose constant aim and object it was to promote their development? I was almost ready to hate my profession; but being before all things a practical man, I congratulated myself on having placed a gulf between the monster and the race of man, and resolved to seek an early opportunity to renew, and, if possible, end the conflict by the destruction of the enemy.

I secured the services of Xavier, who was now ready to follow me anywhere, and of three or four other bold spirits, and taking the engine "John Brown" and appliances of all sorts, steamed up to the broken bridge some sixteen miles above Mestra. Leaving a stoker with instructions to return to Xiqipu for further supplies, as I intended a regular campaign, we crossed the yawning gap by means of stout planks, bearing with us the weapons of our warfare. I had a new idea. If it were possible to deprive Pedro's machine of fuel it would necessarily cease to make steam, and consequently to move. Now, though we could not cut down and remove all the timber along the fourteen miles of line which still remained in possession of the engine, we might at least draw off its supplies of water. Of the three tanks I had constructed at Pedro's request, two were already out of the monster's reach owing to the chasm in the bridge. It remained then to empty the third, and the demon would be finally laid.

On reaching the spot, we found the enemy already there taking in water through its trunk. As soon as it perceived us, it gave a snort and hurriedly retired. I find it impossible to write of this machine without using terms applicable in strictness to the animal world alone, and if my readers are offended I can only say I am sorry. It took several hours to cut through the hard cemented side of the tank and to dig a trench through the embankment on the lower side, but at last it was done, and we had the satisfaction of seeing every drop of water

drained away.

“Let me see,” said I, “supposing the engine has filled, or nearly filled, its boiler, I reckon with fires down it may last at most some ten hours. It is now seven o'clock. About daybreak, then, we may expect another visit. I don’t think the thing will approach us before it is obliged. We will light a good fire and bivouac here, keeping watch by turns. Now for supper and cigars, and then to sleep.”

At four o'clock, we were softly aroused. by Xavier, who said he could hear the foe quietly approaching. We lay low in the grass and soon saw it draw near with every sign of cautious anxiety. Presently, it lowered its trunk and trailed it over the empty tank. We heard the pump begin to work, with no result, of course, except to pump up air. Some time elapsed before the monster appeared conscious of its failure, but at last it retired once more.

“We have it now,” I joyfully exclaimed. “Some two or three hours at most, and its motive force will be gone.” We rose and prepared breakfast. This finished, I led the way up into the mountains, thinking we should find it at the terminus at Santa Fé, just as a wounded creature creeps into its hole to die. We journeyed on for some hours, but the road was rough and we had loads to carry, So that our progress was not rapid. It was mid-day when we arrived in sight of the deserted station.

“There she is,” cried one of the men. And there she was. But in what condition? Extinguished? Lifeless? Cold? Not a bit of it. She was puffing and roaring like a dragon, steam pouring from safety-valve and every aperture, and so full of life that on our approach she rushed from her lair and tore down the line, making a vicious clutch at us with her remaining claw as she passed. I was thunderstruck,

“Assuredly she must be protected by Satan,” said Xavier, his faith in me beginning to fail.

“But where in the world can she have got the water?” said I. “The tank was dry, and her supply must have boiled away hours ago. The station tanks are dry. There is not a drop of water along the line.”

“Except in the ditches,” observed a stoker carelessly.

“The ditches! By Jove, you have hit it. Fool that I was not to think of it sooner. And I was warned, too,”—in Pedro’s letter, of course. “Well, there is no help for it. Our next job must be to drain the ditches.”

We accordingly returned some miles to a point where the trench from which the ballast had been dug formed a long and large ditch which was kept full by a little runlet from the mountain side. Selecting the

lower end of this ditch, I directed my men to shovel away the ballast from under the rails so as to make a channel for the escape of the water.

But our foe was not so readily to be deprived of its last resource. Approaching with much uneasiness she ran over the spot we were excavating, and prepared to extend her great arm.

“Stand back!” I shouted, but there was no need to give the warning.

The work proceeded. We had dug our ditch several feet deep, and wanted little more to draw off the water. The engine passed again, clutching with its hand of steel, but the men were on so much lower a level as to be out of reach of this danger, and they actually went on with their digging, ridiculing its impotent attempts to touch them.

But the enemy had not exhausted her means of offence. Once more she passed over the ditch. Our men worked on.

Suddenly, a frightful rush of steam issued from some unknown vent, directed straight against my men. A terrible scream, and they fell, horribly scalded; one, I feared, fatally, Xavier, very seriously, and two more sufficiently to suffer great pain, but without being incapacitated. One alone besides myself had escaped entirely. We had to give up work for the day, and bear our dying companion as best we could to the bridge where we had left the “John Brown.” Poor fellow, his sufferings were dreadful, and we had no means of alleviating them. The “John Brown” had not yet returned, and we were obliged to await her arrival. I was much distressed at this unhappy occurrence, and felt sure it would now be impossible to obtain any assistance to carry out my design.

I made some remark to this effect to Xavier. Strangely enough, I found his scalding had produced quite a different effect on him. He was filled with rage against the engine, and vowed he would never rest till he had avenged himself.

“Place me where you will,” said he, “bid me to do the most reckless act, and I will obey. Only tell me how to make that monster pay for its treatment to me, and I will shrink from nothing;” and what is more, the other two men concurred,

Late at night, the “John Brown” returned with supplies. We lifted our patient on to the tender, bade him adieu, and despatched the engine to Xiqipu, where he could have proper treatment. Then we returned to our digging.

This time I kept a look-out, and as soon as the engine was in sight, called off the men to a distance where steel arm and steam jets were

alike powerless. At last, the monster in despair took up her position immediately over the trench and there stopped.

What was to be done now? If we attempted to work beneath we should be scalded to death. Meantime, she was extending her trunk to take in water.

“Oh, this will never do,” said I.

“Give me that rifle,” for I had fortunately brought one with me.

I loaded, aimed at the centre of the boiler, and fired. The bullet pierced the outer skin of the engine, but not the boiler itself. But the effect was what I desired. No sooner did she feel the shot than, with a shriek of despair, she gathered up her suction-pipe and fled into the mountains, and we finished our work unmolested. The water was at last drained off from the long ditch, the little trickle that still came down being useless for supplying the engine.

“This time, at any rate, we have settled her,” said I.

Wishing to give ample time for the complete exhaustion of the engine’s tanks, I resolved, though the day was still not far advanced, to remain where we were for the afternoon and night. In the morning we were sure to find the boiler empty and the furnace cold.

So after one more bivouac we set out leisurely enough for our last walk up the line, chatting and telling stories in lightness of heart at feeling our battle was at last won. So pleasantly did we pass the time, that I was surprised when one of us exclaimed, “Here we are.”

Yes, there we were, at the terminus of the line over which I had wasted so much toil. And here we were at the terminus of my long struggle with its inanimate power.

“I don’t see the engine,” said Xavier.

“It has run into the very back of the station, no doubt,” I replied; “or perhaps into one of the sheds. It was sure to crawl into its hole to die.”

We searched the station, but found nothing. In the locomotive shed, nothing. In the goods shed, nothing.

We looked blankly at each other. This mighty machine, weighing tons of iron and steel, had vanished into thin air, and left not a wreck behind!

CHAPTER XII: CONCLUSION

None of us uttered a word, and at length I strolled away through the deserted offices, While the men searched idly in corners as though the machine could be concealed in a mousehole. Xavier, with more shrewdness than I credited him with, had gone to examine the points, and discover by which line the vanished foe had travelled. I was roused by aloud oath proceeding from him.

“Here’s her track!” he shouted.

He was standing at the end of a long siding which had been run out to shoot away waste ballast. We hurried to the spot. Sure enough there were the great wheel tracks following the steep slope— had she rolled to the bottom?—No, for the tracks continued down the valley beyond.

“Let's follow her,” I cried, and we eagerly joined in the pursuit. After an hour we came to a small lake.

“She has stopped here to water,” said Xavier. Yes, but what then?

Instead of continuing her course down the valley, she had turned sharply off up a side valley leading up to the higher mountains.

“On again,” I cried, and another hour brought us to the summit of the pass. From this point we could see several miles, but the enemy was not in sight. Only the deep tracks continued as far as the eye could follow them.

“Well,” said I, “she has escaped us. It is useless to chase her farther, for even on this rough ground she travels faster than we. I think she is sure to break down soon by running over a boulder or trunk of a tree. We may as well turn back now.”

“I won’t turn back,” cried Xavier, with an oath. “I have sworn to be revenged on her, and she shall not escape me so easily.”

“Nonsense, man,” I answered, “you can’t go on alone, and I for one don’t intend to be led on a wild-goose chase no one knows where. What say you, my men?”

They all expressed their wish to return.

“I tell you I will not return,” cried Xavier, “and if you try to force me, I shall resist, and will use my knife against him who would stay me. Shall I be foiled by a machine? Never.”

We spent half-an-hour in useless expostulation. Seeing he would not be persuaded we forced upon him all the provisions we had about us,

as well as my rifle and ammunition, and bade him farewell. We watched his retreating figure disappear in the far distance, till the pangs of hunger urged us to return.

I never saw him again, nor do I know the result of his reckless quest.

As for ourselves we got back to Santa Fé very hungry, but having left the bulk of our provisions there we made a noble supper, and slept in the station-master's bedroom. In the morning we walked down to the rendezvous. The stokers of the "John Brown" were much surprised at our return without Xavier, and seemed a little suspicious of our story about his departure. We succeeded however in satisfying them that there had been no foul play.

For the last time, I travelled down that mountain line. Soon after I bade a final farewell to Xiqipu, and took the "John Brown" with me to a sphere where it would not at any rate rust from idleness. The routine work to which I returned seemed more humdrum than ever after the exciting events of my sojourn in the mountains.

Some months after, a wandering Indian of the old Mexican stock, belonging to a tribe that had striven to secure a precarious freedom from the Spanish yoke by retreat into the distant mountains, came down to the coast with a strange tale.

He stated that three moons before, the War-god, Huitzilopotchli (the same to whom human sacrifices were offered in the old days) had appeared among his tribe. He had fiery eyes, and wore armour of steel that no spear could pierce, and devoured men, women, and children. To save themselves from extermination the tribe had to offer him a victim each day, whom they placed bound within his reach. The god would then approach, seize the unhappy individual and tear him to pieces, and then thrust the remains into his burning maw. His tribe had thus suffered the loss of half its members, including nearly all the children and young girls, when the deity betook himself to another place. They still continued to sacrifice a human victim each full moon, for fear the god should inflict on them another visitation.

I left Mexico after the revolution and murder of the unfortunate Emperor, and returned to England after an absence of several years. There I found that my fame had preceded me, and before I had been home a month I received the offer of the situation of managing engineer to a great firm whose chief wished to retire, and whose junior partners were not quite equal to the position. This post I still retain, with the addition of a partnership, and I have no fault to find with my fortunes.

The events I have recorded had fallen into the far background of my

mind, like a story one has read in childhood, when like a lightning flash they came back to me on reading the following paragraph a few days since in a leading newspaper:

“Strange occurrence in Mexico. The inhabitants of the town of Nombre have recently been much surprised and not a little alarmed by appearances which indicate the existence of some monstrous serpent or lizard utterly transcending in size and power all known terrestrial creatures. Huge masses of earth have been scored away and piled up in wild disorder in the course of a single night, as though some enormous worm had burrowed or wallowed its way through the fields. On other occasions, and in an equally short space of time, a path has been found cleared through a dense forest, the trees and undergrowth being not only cut down but apparently removed. Should this extraordinary rumour prove to be true, it would certainly seem to indicate the survival of some primeval monster, such as those great Saurians, whose bones we admire in our museums, although it is doubtful whether the hugest of them could produce the astonishing effects described by the Mexican papers. Doubtless, however, these stories are much exaggerated.”

Great Saurians, indeed! Do I not know that it is my poor friend Pedro’s engine, alive and working mischief all these years after its maker’s death, and developing Heaven knows what new powers of destruction directed against the human race, from which it has already wrested many, many victims?

Truly

“The evil that men do lives after them,
The good is oft interred with their bones.”

But who that has the instinct of justice, can consider my poor, honest, clever, kindly Pedro da Luz responsible for all the mischief wrought by his too-cunning handiwork?

And now, having told you all I know of the matter, and thanking you for your attention to a plain unliterary man’s tale, I bid you respectfully, Farewell.

THE END.

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TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE:

- Original authorial spellings and archaic words have been preserved.
- One obvious typo was corrected (the end of the sixth paragraph of the first chapter: "fried" changed to "friend")

- This edition was prepared from the seventh edition, 1889.